

*The Contained*

**An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)**

**by**

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## Abstract

Similarly to most fields, architecture often fluctuates between particular styles which remain prevalent for vast periods of time. These styles typically remain in place until either the society undergoes change or the means of production begin to grow and evolve. Contemporary architecture is no different as buildings both formally and tectonically have largely remained similar for the past half of a century. This stagnation is particularly evident in residential architecture as the majority of citizens in the United States reside in either a conventional suburban home, large apartment blocks, or residential towers. In modern society and in the suburbs, the traditional gabled façade has become the embodiment of the house typology which conveys a sense of conformity and uniformity while maintaining marginal latitude for individual expression. In this project, I offer a contrasting proposal for residential architecture; speculating on a new form of residential architecture that manipulates and deviates from an existing suburban residence.

## Acknowledgments

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### Process Analysis Statement

At the initiation of this project, there were a number of questions and inquiries regarding the role of the suburban home and the reasoning behind their rise to prominence in the United States. In a large part due to the complex nature of the suburbs and the vast and integral role they play in modern American living, I found that examining housing typologies on a more localized scale would allow for a more rigorous study and a more manageable project at an architectural scale rather than addressing these issues at a regional or city scale. Rather than attempting to find a solution to the suburbs as a whole which has much larger implications, my goal for this project shifted and focused on choosing a particular residential style for analysis and using these insights to distort a sample home. The goal for this project was, in contrast to changing the fabric of the suburbs, to create a new and foreign form that, through its difference, undermines the integrity and philosophy of the regimented and monotonous suburban landscape.

At the early stages of the project, I felt drawn to the idea of further analyzing and studying Gothic architecture and its relation to suburban residences for a variety of reasons. Potentially due to its typical use in solemn religious or historic spaces, Gothic architecture has always resonated with me and hence I thought it would be a good starting point for this project. Rather than using traditional Gothic architecture however, I elected to examine the Gothic Revival style of the late nineteenth century as it is still in use in modern society and can still be seen, though somewhat rarely, in the fabric of the suburbs. Gothic Revival homes also became an interesting inquiry for me as it grew out of a style typically associated with the public realm, particularly political or religious, and has been coopted for use as a private residence. This tradition of manipulating a style for new programmatic needs suited my purposes well as a



precedent for the ruination of a typology or architectural elements to create a new language or form.

After electing to modify a Gothic Revival home, the next step was to identify and digitally model an existing home in order to begin deviating and manipulating the form and function of the house. For the purpose of relating the project to the context of the suburb, I selected an existing Gothic Revival home that was rather conventional yet had a few unique elements that I could either enhance or conversely deemphasize. This home, selected from floor plans by Samuel Sloan, was characterized by a number of key features that I intended to manipulate and deviate (Sloan 100.) The primary layout of the existing home in terms of spatial and formal language was characterized by a central void that served as a staircase with three main facades or forms permeating from the core. These extrusions served as the primary living quarters and bedchambers with two secondary aggregate forms highlighting the connection of these extrusions. Due to the location of these secondary aggregates and the addition of two bay windows on two of the extrusions, the existing house had a decided front that catered to the idea of the suburban street that I hoped to disrupt. The existing home, like many Gothic Revival buildings, was overly ornamented with ornate trim on the roof, chimney, and walls as a means of highlighting edge conditions and in order to show the programmatic prominence of certain forms and locations. One of the final unique feature of the existing house was the placement and overstated nature of three chimneys puncturing through the primary extrusions, all of which remained unique and emphasized their own individuality.

After examining the existing house, I began to use some of the inherent logics within the residence to grow and modify the house with a new formal language. One of the primary issues with this process was disassociating the form of the house with the program because the goal was

to manipulate the form of the house first and then reevaluate the program after this process occurred. As I was considering this a speculative project for the near future rather than our immediate society, I began to experiment with futuristic forms primarily through the expression of forty-five degree angle cuts and the use of curvilinear pipes to connect the existing home to the new form. In the interest of maintaining some of the integrity and ideals of the previous home, I had sought to perform similar design operations with the new form such as continuing the three primary extrusions from the core of the house and expanding on the two secondary aggregates. In addition to this, I added a third, smaller aggregate in the interstitial space between the final two extrusions in order to continue placing aggregate forms in the edge conditions. In addition to these large scale design operations, I also performed smaller, formal operations in order to expand the existing home. These actions included disrupting and extending the roof planes over the extrusions, modification of the basement walls, and the extension and remodeling of the chimneys with the new formal language.

After performing these operations, I had created a new formal composition that highlighted some of the key features of the Gothic Revival home but was devoid of materiality and programmatic function. In order to remedy this issue, I began to look at the role of the human within this form and the degree in which these humans should interact. I elected to keep the three occupants from the original house but began to modify where their primary living spaces were and the circulation to and from the social and private spaces. Rather than the original home where each extrusion dispersed occupancy by forcing occupants into an individual extrusion, I created a new configuration with the three occupant chambers in close proximity at the front of the house. The other growths or modified forms began to house other programs such as the living room, kitchen, dining room, restroom and various other secondary or tertiary



programs. My purpose in scattering the social spaces is that, by forcing the occupants to weave through these new physical and visual barriers, the social interaction will be anticipated and more rewarding to the individuals. Due to the compartmental nature of each of the capsules that relate to the original house, each capsule is self-contained and has its own program. I also felt that the contrast between the original house and the new form was vital to the reading and understanding of the project so I selectively used the new geometry to frame or highlight key architectural elements from the existing home such as the window apertures and door thresholds. Throughout the majority of the house, I respected the integrity of the original home but at times, due to the creation of level changes and variations within the new growths, new doors cuts and wall lacerations had to be made within the walls of the existing home.

In addition to maintaining the integrity of the home, I felt that it was important to reference and sample materials from the original home on the interior in order to give the illusion of comfort or familiarity. On the exterior, the new form had grown to use vastly different materials than the previous home such as aluminum panels and metal plates, but on the interior these new forms masquerade as antiquity by shrouding themselves in wood paneling and familiar plaster. Through this change in material, I hoped to provide a wayfinding element to quickly announce to the occupants the primary spaces and places for human interaction and occupancy. These materials began to frame the entryways to social spaces, highlight key views to the exterior, and became integrated into the furniture with the desire of relating the materials to the human scale. Previous elements from the existing home, while still evident, selectively shifted in their function such as the three deviated chimneys that became skylights rather than ventilation or the bay window that, due to the necessity of floor changes, became a door.

My project, though speculative, offers a contrasting view to the suburbs of what it means to create residential architecture in the modern age. While I agree that my proposal is not currently economically feasible and may not be the ideal solution, I feel that this has bettered my understanding of housing typologies and why our dwellings have progressed to the point of massive suburban sprawl. Though perhaps extreme, I feel that with current changes in our society and with modern technological developments a balance point can be met between my proposal and the typical suburbs in general to insure that our residential architecture does not stagnate and fall behind the ideals of our evolving culture.

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